

Jhana and Lokuttarajjhana

by Ajahn Brahmali

1. Introduction

When reading the (1) Suttas of the Pali Canon it is difficult not to be struck by the central importance of *samādhi* and *jhāna* on the Buddhist path, (2) *Samādhi* and *jhāna* appear in Sutta after Sutta, often as the pivotal condition that allows deep insight into the nature of existence. In spite of this, there appears to have been an historical tendency to underestimate the importance of these states.(3) Perhaps the most potent of the many factors that have lead to such underestimation was the early post-*Nikāya* rise of the Abhidhamma concept of '*lokuttarajjhāna*'. In this paper I wish to examine this concept, to investigate whether it has any counterpart in the Suttas, to discuss the implications of using it to interpret the Suttas, and finally to look more closely at the Abhidhamma's treatment of *lokuttarajjhāna*. I will argue that the common Commentarial practice of using *lokuttarajjhāna* to define *jhāna* is misleading.

2. The Concept of Lokuttarajjhāna

The very name '*lokuttarajjhāna*' suggests a connection to *jhāna* and by implication to *sammāsamādhi* and *samādhi* in general. However, whereas *jhāna* and *samādhi* are important doctrinal terms of the Pali Suttas, *lokuttarajjhāna* first appears in the Abhidhamma. To avoid any confusion between these various terms it is necessary to look more closely at the Abhidhamma's definition.(4)

According to Abhidhamma theory each stage of Enlightenment is experienced through two types of consciousness, known as *magga* (path) and *phala* (fruit). The first type of consciousness, the *magga*, which lasts only one mind moment, has the function of cutting off mental fetters. The second type, the *phala*, is the experience of bliss that results from the cutting off of the fetters by the *magga* consciousness.(5) Again according to the Abhidhamma, these two types of consciousness are experienced together with a particular set of *jhāna* factors that correspond to each of the four *jhānas* respectively.(6) Thus they are called '*lokuttarajjhānas*', 'transcendent *jhānas*',(7) because they combine the *jhāna* factors with an Enlightenment experience.

From this it emerges that the Abhidhamma term *lokuttarajjhāna* is a name for the particular moment one attains one of the various stages of Enlightenment. The Suttas have their own terminology for describing these attainments, terminology that does not refer to momentary experiences and that never explicitly relates to *samādhi* or *jhāna*.(8) Consequently, it seems from the outset that *lokuttarajjhāna* and *jhāna/samādhi* refer to very different types of experience.(9)

3. Ariyo Sammāsamādhi

In spite of the above, it has been argued that *lokuttarajjhāna*, in its momentary Abhidhamma sense, is implicitly referred to in the Suttas but using different terminology. Of all the Sutta terminology it is perhaps '*ariyo sammāsamādhi*', 'noble right *samādhi*', which is most often identified as *lokuttarajjhāna*.(10) It appears it is the qualifier '*ariya*' which has made this identification common. '*Ariya*', 'noble', is a Sutta term usually referring to the persons who have attained one of the stages of Enlightenment. Therefore, when it is used as a qualifier, it is likely to signify some connection to the stages of Enlightenment. To discover what this connection is we need to look at how this phrase is used in the Suttas.

Ariyo sammāsamādhi is only found on five separate occasions in the Suttas.(11) Two of these occasions are simply the same bare definitions:

"There are: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness. The one-pointedness of mind equipped with these seven factors is called noble right concentration (*sammāsamādhi*) 'with its supports', and also 'with its accessories'."(12)

This is not enough to give a precise idea of the phrase, but at least it makes it clear that only a person practicing the Noble Eightfold Path can have this kind of *samādhi*.

The third occasion is found at M117 where '*ariyo sammāsamādhi*' is initially explained in the same way as above, but then expanded on considerably. Of particular importance here is that the factor of *sammāditthi*, one of the seven 'equipments' mentioned above, can be either the Noble Right View of the *Sotāpanna* or it can be ordinary right view possessed by the person who is not yet a *Sotāpanna*.(13) Thus it seems that it is possible to possess *ariyo sammāsamādhi* without yet having attained to *Sotāpatti*. If this is correct, it is impossible that this *samādhi* is the '*lokuttarajjhāna*' of the Abhidhamma.(14)

The fourth occurrence of *ariyo sammāsamādhi* does not add anything of interest but the fifth occurrence is important: it

is a statement of what this *samādhī* consists of.⁽¹⁵⁾ Not surprisingly it is said to consist of the four *jhānas* and also "*the reviewing sign which is well-grasped, well-attended to, well-considered, and well-penetrated by wisdom*".⁽¹⁶⁾ Note that there is nothing here about attaining any of the stages of Enlightenment, just the standard passage on the four *jhānas* together with the usual similes. If there ever was a time for clearly defining '*lokuttarajjhāna*', if that were what is meant by *ariya sammāsamādhī*, this would seem to be the ideal opportunity. Each time an obvious opportunity for an explicit definition is missed, any claim that *lokuttarajjhāna* is what is meant is severely undermined. Even the Commentary does not seem to define *ariyo sammāsamādhī* here as anything but 'ordinary' *jhāna*.⁽¹⁷⁾ In conclusion, there is no evidence in the Suttas that *ariyo sammāsamādhī* refers to *lokuttarajjhāna*, but the evidence to the contrary is sufficient to throw serious doubts on this interpretation.⁽¹⁸⁾

It thus appears that even the most promising candidate-term from the Suttas has nothing to do with the Abhidhamma's *lokuttarajjhāna*. If this is correct, then it is unlikely that there is any terminology at all in the Suttas that is equivalent to *lokuttarajjhāna*. If the most promising terminology fails to hit the mark, then any other terminology is even less likely to do so.

However, it is still necessary to investigate whether the terms '*jhāna*' or '*samādhī*' in themselves, as they occur in the Suttas, have a twofold meaning, sometimes referring to ordinary *jhāna* but at other times referring to *lokuttarajjhāna*.⁽¹⁹⁾ This takes us to the Commentaries, which often assert that particular instances of *jhāna* or *samādhī* in the Suttas actually refer to *lokuttarajjhāna*.

4. Commentarial Interpretations

An important aspect of the Commentaries' method is the use of later concepts, especially from the Abhidhamma, to explain the Suttas. In practice this means that when *jhāna* or *samādhī* occur in the Suttas, the Commentaries decide whether 'ordinary' *jhāna* is meant or *lokuttarajjhāna*.⁽²⁰⁾ The result is that the Commentaries back-read a later concept into the Suttas themselves. To find out whether this is reasonable, it is instructive to investigate a few examples of such Commentarial interpretations.

4.1 Samanamandika Sutta, M78 (21)

This Sutta contains a, for our purposes, interesting discussion on the ending of intentions. The Sutta states that all unwholesome intentions cease without remainder in the first *jhāna* and that all wholesome intentions cease without remainder in the second *jhāna*.⁽²²⁾ The Commentary then goes on to define both instances of *jhāna* here as *lokuttarajjhāna*: the first being equivalent to the state of *Anāgāmī* and the second that of *Arahant*.⁽²³⁾

There are several issues here. Firstly, one might ask why the Sutta speaks of *jhāna* when in fact, according to the Commentary, it means the attainment of *Anāgāmī* and *Arahant* respectively. There are several standard ways in which the Suttas describe the attainments of *Anāgāmī* and *Arahant*, but '*jhāna*' is not one of them. One may then wonder why this Sutta does not apply one of these standard ways of describing such attainments rather than use a term, i.e. *jhāna*, which ordinarily has a completely different meaning. According to the Suttas the "*brahmacariya is endowed with all aspects, fulfilled in all aspects, not deficient, with nothing superfluous, well-proclaimed, fully complete, well-expounded*".⁽²⁴⁾ but if the Commentary is right, then one could rightfully question whether this Sutta is indeed "*well-proclaimed*". The fact is that using *jhāna* in this context while meaning the attainments of *Anāgāmī* and *Arahant* would obscure the passage considerably and one would be totally dependent on outside expertise, i.e. the Commentaries, to unravel the meaning.⁽²⁵⁾ The Buddha never said that one needed to depend on outside expertise to understand his teachings, quite the contrary according to the above quote.⁽²⁶⁾

Even more problematic for the Commentary's interpretation is the differentiation in the present Sutta between the use of the first *jhāna* to describe the ending of unwholesome intentions and the second *jhāna* to describe the ending of wholesome intentions. If indeed, as the Commentary holds, this refers to the attainments of *Anāgāmī* and *Arahant* respectively, then the level of *jhāna* is in fact completely irrelevant as far as the ending of the corresponding intentions is concerned. Again, one can only wonder whether such a presentation could be considered "*well-proclaimed*".

Lastly, the Sutta is perfectly well explainable in terms of 'ordinary' *jhāna* without having to bring in an explanation from the Abhidhamma. The first *jhāna* is throughout the Suttas qualified as "*secluded from unwholesome states*",⁽²⁷⁾ which would include unwholesome intentions. In the second *jhāna* the *vitakka* and *vicāra* aspects of first *jhāna* cease. In the first *jhāna* these aspects are the movement of the mind onto the object and the holding on to the object respectively. It is easy to see how this could be regarded as the last vestige of intention, the mind intending towards the wholesome object of the first *jhāna*. In the second *jhāna* the mind is perfectly concentrated,⁽²⁸⁾ all movement has been abandoned, and therefore all intention, wholesome and unwholesome, has "*ceased without remainder*".⁽²⁹⁾

4.2 So Vata Sutta (30)

This Sutta is of particular importance because it gives a sequence of conditions without which a given effect cannot occur. The most interesting relationship for the purposes of this paper is the one between "*sammāsamādhī*" (i.e. *jhāna*) and "*the abandoning of the fetters*", where the latter is said to be impossible ("*thānam n'etam vijjati*") without the former. This is clearly an important statement as it gives a fixed sequence of how the Buddhist path must be developed.

It is therefore highly significant when the Commentary to this passage states that what is meant here by *sammāsamādhī* is in fact *lokuttarajjhāna*.⁽³¹⁾ It is not difficult to see how this Commentarial interpretation undermines the vital

necessity of *jhāna* on the path and potentially has a significant impact on our understanding of the Suttas. It is therefore necessary to investigate whether there are any grounds for the Commentary's assertion.

The first thing to note is that if *sammāsamādhi* here really is a reference to *lokuttarajjhāna*, this passage in effect says that the necessary condition for *lokuttarajjhāna* (i.e. "the abandoning of the fetters", which in Abhidhamma terminology is a *lokuttarajjhāna* mind moment) is *lokuttarajjhāna* itself. Thus the whole purpose of the causal sequence is defeated.⁽³²⁾ Moreover, as the *sammāsamādhi* here is defined by the Commentary as including both path and fruit, whereas "the abandoning of the fetters" is just a path moment, one ends up with a situation where the effect precedes the cause.⁽³³⁾ This clearly makes no sense.

At this point it seems worthwhile to quote a larger portion of the passage we are concerned with:

"Not grasping the sign of the mind, one will fulfill right view', this is not possible. 'Not having fulfilled right view, one will fulfill *sammāsamādhi*', this is not possible. 'Not having fulfilled *sammāsamādhi*, one will abandon the fetters', this is not possible. 'Not having abandoned the fetters, one will realize *Nibbāna*', this is not possible."⁽³⁴⁾

Of interest here is that *sammāditthi* must be fulfilled before *sammāsamādhi* can be fulfilled. In Sutta usage the fulfilment of *sammāditthi* is equivalent to the attainment of *Sotāpatti*. The attainment of *Sotāpatti* in turn is a *lokuttarajjhāna* moment according to Abhidhamma terminology. Thus, once again, if one is to follow the Commentarial interpretation, one arrives at a situation where *lokuttarajjhāna* (i.e. *sammāditthi*) is the cause for *lokuttarajjhāna* (i.e. *sammāsamādhi*). Thus the conditional relationship expressed in the Sutta is apparently reduced to something quite trivial. To summarise, both "the abandoning of the fetters" and "the fulfillment of right view" are redundant if *sammāsamādhi* (as *lokuttarajjhāna*) encompasses both of them.

The final question we need to answer is whether reading *sammāsamādhi* in the present passage as 'ordinary' *jhāna* is confirmed or negated by other Suttas. It is well known that *jhāna* and *sammāsamādhi* occur very frequently in the Suttas as part of the training leading to the attainment of *Arahantship*. Perhaps the most significant of these occurrences is the listing of the four *jhānas* in the gradual training immediately prior to the attainment of the three higher knowledges (*tevijjā*). This sequence is found countless times throughout the Suttas.⁽³⁵⁾ However, this does not establish that attaining *Arahantship* is impossible without 'ordinary' *jhāna*, as the *So Vata* Sutta seems to imply. To find such a passage we need to turn to M64:

"There is a path, Ānanda, a way to the abandoning of the five lower fetters; that anyone without relying on that path, on that way shall know or see or abandon the five lower fetters - this is not possible. Just as when there is a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, it is not possible that anyone shall cut out its heartwood without cutting through its bark and sapwood ...

And what Ānanda is the path, the way to the abandoning of the five lower fetters? Here Ānanda a bhikkhu ... enters upon and abides in the first *jhāna* ... the second *jhāna* ... the third *jhāna* ... the fourth *jhāna* ..."⁽³⁶⁾

Note that this passage is very clear that it is impossible to become an *Anāgāmī* without having attained at least the first *jhāna*. Also significant is that the Commentary does not define *jhāna* here as *lokuttarajjhāna*, and thus one has to assume that also the Commentary regards this as 'ordinary' *jhāna*.⁽³⁷⁾

Again, given this evidence from the Suttas, one can only conclude that there is no evidence to support the Commentarial assertion that what is meant by *sammāsamādhi* in the *So Vata* Sutta is in fact *lokuttarajjhāna*. Quite the contrary, the standard Sutta explanation of *sammāsamādhi*, as referring to the (ordinary) four *jhānas*, fits the situation perfectly.

4.3 Other Suttas

The above examples are only two among a large number where the Commentaries claim that *jhāna* or *samādhi* in the Suttas actually refer to *lokuttarajjhāna*. It would be an enormous amount of work to investigate each one of these occurrences to evaluate whether the Commentarial interpretations are reasonable. In many instances it would in fact be impossible to come to any satisfactory conclusion because of a lack of revealing contextual evidence. In these circumstances one is left with the Commentarial interpretation without any way of validating the Commentary's assertions. This is surely not satisfactory, particularly when there is no convincing evidence from the Suttas that *jhāna* or *samādhi* ever refers to the attainment of the stages of Enlightenment.⁽³⁸⁾ There appears to be only one possible solution to this problem and that is to assume that *jhāna* and *samādhi* in the Suttas always refer to 'ordinary' *jhāna* and *samādhi* even if this goes directly against the Commentarial view.⁽³⁹⁾

5. The Danger in Reduced Respect for *samādhi* and *jhāna*

If the analysis so far, on the whole, is accepted, it might reasonably be asked why the Commentaries would mistakenly reinterpret the *jhāna/samādhi* of central Sutta passages in terms of the later Abhidhamma concept of *lokuttarajjhāna* and thereby significantly distort the message of the former. There are in fact several Sutta passages that relate to this question. These passages concern the future of the Dhamma and, in particular, they mention how a reduced respect for *samādhi* is a condition for the decline of the Buddha's teaching as a whole. Consider the following:

"Just as, Kassapa, gold does not disappear so long as counterfeit gold has not arisen in the world, but when counterfeit gold arises true gold disappears, so the true Dhamma does not disappear so long as a counterfeit of the true Dhamma has not arisen in the world, but when a counterfeit of the true Dhamma arises in the world then the true Dhamma disappears. ...

It is senseless people who arise right here who cause the true Dhamma to disappear.

The true Dhamma does not disappear all at once in the way a ship sinks. There are, Kassapa, five detrimental things that lead to the decay and disappearance of the true Dhamma. What are the five? Here the bhikkhus, the bhikkhunis, the male lay followers, and the female lay followers dwell without reverence and deference towards the Teacher ... towards the Dhamma ... towards the Sangha ... towards the training ... towards concentration [*samādhi*]. These are the five detrimental things that lead to the decay and disappearance of the true Dhamma."[\(40\)](#)

Thus it appears that over time there is a natural tendency for the Dhamma to get distorted, that the distorters are members of the Sangha itself, and finally that one of the factors that lead to the gradual confusion and disappearance of the Dhamma is a lack of reverence and deference for *samādhi*.[\(41\)](#) It is easy to see why the Triple Gem and the training as a whole are mentioned here, because lack of respect for any of these is tantamount to a repudiation of the entire Dhamma. But it is quite remarkable that *samādhi* is the one aspect of the training that is singled out here, not wisdom, not the four *satipatthānas* or any other aspect of the path. And this is only one among many instances where *samādhi* is singled out in this way.[\(42\)](#) This is surely highly significant and says much about the central importance of *samādhi* in the Dhamma.

So it seems that it is to be expected that the important role of *samādhi* is undermined over time, and therefore one should perhaps not be surprised that this is exactly what seems to happen in the Pali Commentaries.[\(43\)](#) Maybe this is because *samādhi* can appear so difficult to achieve. But this is obviously not a sufficient reason to downgrade its importance. *Samādhi* is an integral part of the Buddhist path and any attempt to reduce its importance because it is hard to achieve, will only result in the exact opposite, making the true goal of the path, Enlightenment, even more difficult to achieve. By overlooking the absolutely central importance of *samādhi* one is in grave danger of making the supreme goal of the Buddhist practice unattainable.

6. *Abhidhamma-bhājanīya* & *Suttanta-bhājanīya*

In light of the above, it may prove useful to take a closer look at the Abhidhamma.[\(44\)](#) The first thing to notice about the Abhidhamma's treatment is that it is divided into two separate categories, the Sutta-exposition (*Suttanta-bhājanīya*) and the Abhidhamma-exposition (*Abhidhamma-bhājanīya*).[\(45\)](#) This is of great importance for this study because it suggests that the Suttas and the Abhidhamma must be kept strictly apart and, more particularly, that the Abhidhamma analysis is not applicable to the Suttas.

This conclusion is reinforced by a closer comparison of the Sutta-exposition with the Abhidhamma-exposition. The *Suttanta-bhājanīya* is a list of factors, together with definitions, of some of the most important doctrinal sets found in the Suttas.[\(46\)](#) The exposition is largely identical to that of the Suttas, as one would expect. In the Suttas these sets are concerned with the pragmatic problem of how to arrive at Enlightenment, and the various factors listed refer to qualities of mind that have to be developed for Enlightenment to be possible.[\(47\)](#) The *Abhidhamma-bhājanīya*, however, is a significant departure from the Sutta-exposition. It discusses the same sets, but the definitions of the individual factors are here quite different from those found in the Suttas. The emphasis is now on how these factors, when they are fully developed, take part in the experiences of the stages of Enlightenment.[\(48\)](#) The Abhidhamma's purpose, therefore, is to describe the *contents* of specific states of mind rather than the *path* by which one arrives at those states.[\(49\)](#) In other words, where the Suttas and the Abhidhamma speak of what appears to be the same sets, they are actually speaking of quite different things. It now becomes clear why the Sutta-exposition has to be kept apart from the Abhidhamma-exposition.[\(50\)](#)

The above can now be related to *jhāna/samādhi* and *lokuttarajjhāna*. *Samādhi* and *jhāna* are terms used in the *Suttanta-bhājanīya* and thus they refer to Sutta usage. In particular, as they are closely related to the above mentioned sets that constitute the path to Enlightenment, they are factors of that same path. *Lokuttarajjhāna*, on the other hand, belongs to the *Abhidhamma-bhājanīya* and is a term for the constellation of mental factors present at the moments of Enlightenment. Being a term peculiar to the *Abhidhamma-bhājanīya*, it only relates to the Abhidhamma and can therefore not be used to explain *samādhi* or *jhāna* as it appears in the Suttas. If this is correct, it follows that the Commentaries make a dangerous blunder when they explain *jhāna* and *samādhi* with Abhidhamma terminology that was never capable of being used in this way.

7. Conclusion

It is sometimes claimed that the Abhidhamma is simply a natural extension of the Suttas, and that its ideas flow without conflict straight out of concepts already established in the Suttas. This may be largely correct, but there is always a problem of unforeseen consequences when one elaborates on a body of texts of such fundamental importance for Buddhism as the original Suttas. I hope I have been able to show one such instance of unforeseen consequences, and an important one at that, in which the Suttas are effectively rewritten in line with later concepts and terminology.[\(51\)](#) It shows that one has to be careful about uncritically accepting the Commentaries' interpretations of the Suttas. This is

particularly so when established Sutta concepts are redefined by the Commentaries in accordance with ideas that arose after the Suttas were composed.

As for the term *lokuttarajjhāna*, I suggest that it was never meant to be used apart from the Abhidhamma itself. The idea of *lokuttarajjhāna* may very well be a reasonable description of attainments on the Buddhist path, but this does not mean that it has any direct counterpart in the Suttas: in fact it seems clear that it does not. Because *lokuttarajjhāna* concerns the *goal* of the path, and not the path itself, the Commentaries' redefinition of *jhānasamādhi* in terms of *lokuttarajjhāna* has the effect of shifting the reality of *jhāna* from being a factor of the path to becoming a result of the practice of the path. Thus the Suttas' insistence on the centrality of *jhānasamādhi* as a path factor is undermined, an undermining which only serves to seriously distort the timeless message of the Buddha.

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References: All references are to volume number, page number, and line number of the Pali texts published by the Pali Text Society.

Abbreviations: Vin: *Vinaya Pīṭaka*; D: *Dīgha Nikāya*; M: *Majjhima Nikāya*; S: *Samyutta Nikāya*; A: *Anguttara Nikāya*; Dhs: *Dhammasangani*; Vibh: *Vibhanga*; DA: *Dīgha Nikāya Commentary*; MA: *Majjhima Nikāya Commentary*; AA: *Anguttara Nikāya Commentary*.

Notes

• (1) The term 'Sutta' in this paper generally refers to the four main *Nikāyas* of the *Sutta Pīṭaka*: the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the *Samyutta Nikāya*, and the *Anguttara Nikāya*. □

• (2) By *samādhi* I generally understand the four *jhānas*, sometimes a slightly broader concept. □

It might be thought that this is a narrow understanding of *samādhi* because the Suttas contain many instances of *samādhi* that are clearly not *jhāna*. These *samādhis* can broadly be classified into two types: *samādhi* that can arise prior to *jhāna* and *samādhi* that comes after *jhāna* and that depends on *jhāna*. Into the latter category fall the formless attainments, the *samādhi* that leads to *Arahantship* (see A.II.45,23-33) and also the *samādhi* that is the result of *Arahantship* (see A.V.7,7 - 10,2). Because these *samādhis* are based on *jhāna* their existence confirms the importance of *jhāna* on the path.

Into the former category fall such *samādhis* as *animittasamādhi*, *suññatasamādhi* and *appanīhtasamādhi* (see e.g. D.III.219,21-22), *samādhi* gained from walking meditation (see A.III.30) and possibly *samādhi* in conjunction with *satīpatthāna* (see S.V.144,19 - 145,19 & A.IV.300,24 - 301,15). But even with these *samādhis* it is far from clear that they do not, or at least cannot, rely on *jhāna*. In the case of (A.IV.300,24 - 301,15), if one is to follow the sequential presentation in the Sutta strictly (which presumably one must), *jhāna* precedes the *samādhis* based on *satīpatthāna*. The same is quite possibly true of (S.V.144,19 - 145,19). As for the first three *samādhis* of *animittasamādhi* etc., it seems that they also are normally practised after *jhāna* (see M.III.111), although the evidence may not be conclusive that they have to be.

The most important fact about the various types of *samādhi*, however, is that by far the most frequently occurring type is *jhāna*. The three *samādhis* of *animittasamādhi*, *suññatasamādhi* and *appanīhtasamādhi* occur very rarely in the Suttas compared to *jhāna*, and the same is true for "*satīpatthāna samādhi*". Thus the relative importance of *jhāna* far outweighs the importance of any of the other types of *samādhi* and *jhāna* is therefore the preeminent type of *samādhi* on the Buddhist path. Thus when the Suttas only speak of *samādhi*, without further qualification, it seems reasonable to conclude that this is predominantly a reference to *jhāna*.

• (3) By historical tendency I primarily mean the shift in focus from the *Nikāyas* to the Commentaries. Where the *Nikāyas* put great emphasis on *samādhi* and *jhāna*, even saying that full Enlightenment is impossible without *jhāna* (see "*So Vata Sutta*", section 4.2), the Commentaries shift the emphasis towards pure *vipassanā* practice and in the process invent new terminology such as "*sukkhavipassaka*" (one who practises dry insight) and "*suddhavipassanā*" (pure insight). This shift in emphasis has been very influential to the present day. *vipassanā* meditation with little emphasis on *samādhi*, and often no emphasis on *jhānas*, has been by far the most influential "meditation system" of the Theravada tradition worldwide in the second half of the 20th century. □

- (4) It should be noted that, although the term *lokuttarajjhāna* first appears in the Canonical Abhidhamma, it is precisely defined only in the Abhidhamma Commentaries. Whether the Abhidhamma Commentaries understand *lokuttarajjhāna* in the same way as the Canonical Abhidhamma is a moot point. However, because my main critique in this paper is aimed at the Sutta Commentaries, which presuppose both the Canonical Abhidhamma as well as its Commentaries, I have made no distinction between the two.□
- (5) According to the Abhidhamma Commentaries the fruit consciousness lasts two or three mind moments (see "A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma" by Bhikkhu Bodhi, p.177).□
- (6) And also to a fivefold classification of *jhāna* adopted by the Abhidhamma (cf. Dhs. 167-174) but which is only rarely mentioned in the Suttas (cf. M.III.162,15).□
- (7) Lit. '*jhānas* beyond the world'. □
- (8) The Suttas, in contrast with the Abhidhamma, never focus exclusively on the precise moments that the stages of Enlightenment are attained. Rather, the Suttas seem to speak of these stages as "ongoing realities". Typical terminology used in the Suttas include: "*dhammacakkhum udapādi*", "the eye of the Dhamma arose", (e.g. Vin.I.11,34); "*sammāditthiyā uppādāya*", "the arising of right view", (M.I.294,1); "*sotāpattiphalam pi sacchikaronti, sakadāgāmīphalam pi sacchikaronti, anāgāmīphalam pi sacchikaronti, arahattam pi sacchikaronti*", "they realised the fruit of streamentry, they realised the fruit of once-returner, they realised the fruit of non-returner, they realised the fruit of Arahantship", (D.I.229,4); "*anupadāya āsavehi cittāni vimuccimsu*", "(their) minds were freed from the outflowings without grasping", (e.g. Vin.I.14,35); "*āsavānam khayam pāpunāti*", "he attained the destruction of the outflowings", (M.I.436,4). Each of these refers to enduring realities.□
- (9) For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that the Suttas on a few occasions mention types of *samādhi* that possibly are directly related to the attainment of the four stages of Enlightenment. The most important example would seem to be *animittasamādhi*, see (A.IV.78,18-30). However, even these *samādhis* do not appear to be momentary in the sense that *lokuttarajjhāna* is said to be.□
- (10) This is how the Commentaries tend to understand this term, e.g. (MA.IV.130,22-24): "*Tattha ariyan ti niddosam. Lokuttaram niddosam hi ariyan ti vuccati. sammāsamādhin ti maggasamādhim*" - "Therein *ariya* means undefiled. For *ariya* is called the undefiled which is supramundane. *Sammāsamādhi* means path-*samādhi* [i.e. *lokuttarajjhāna*]" (AA.IV.28,19); "*samādhiparikkhārā ti maggasamādhissa sambhārā*" - "Requisite of *samādhi* means a constituent of path-*samādhi*". See also Rupert Gettin's "The Buddhist Path to Awakening", p.218, line 19-22: "Secondly there is the attainment of right view etc. as noble, without āsavas, lokuttara, a factor of the path. It is precisely this second stage that must be understood as ariyo sammāsamādhi sa-upaniso sa-parikkhāro." □
- (11) It should be noted that only 5 occurrences in the four main *Nikāyas* makes the phrase a rare one. There are also two occurrences of a *samādhi* (as opposed to *sammāsamādhi*) which is said to be 'ariya' (D.III.278,27 & A.III.24,15).□
- (12) (S.V.21,13-17) & (A.IV.40,23-27) -

"Seyyathīdam sammāditthi sammāsankappo sammāvācā sammākammanto sammā-ājīvo sammāvāyāmo sammāsati. Yā kho bhikkhave imehi sattahangehi cittassa ekaggatā saparikkhārā, ayam vuccati bhikkhave ariyo sammāsamādhi sa-upaniso iti pi saparikkhāro iti p ti." □
- (13) (M.III.72,4-28) -

"Katamā ca, bhikkhave, sammāditthi? Sammāditthi p'aham, bhikkhave, dvayam vadāmi. Atthi, bhikkhave, sammāditthi sāsavā puññābhāgiyā upadhivepakkā; atthi, bhikkhave, sammāditthi ariyā anāsavā lokuttarā maggāngā."

Then the two types of right view are explained in more detail.□

- (14) Unfortunately it is not perfectly clear in the Sutta whether the twofold right view refers to two separate ways in which *sammāditthi* acts as a requisite to *ariya sammāsamādhi* or whether both aspects of the twofold *sammāditthi* are part of the same *sammāditthi* which is a requisite to *ariya sammāsamādhi*. But even if the latter is the case it is not necessary to bring in *lokuttarajjhāna* as an explanation. I would propose, instead, that in this case *ariya* should be understood as a direct reference to the person practising *ariya sammāsamādhi*, i.e. that he is at least a *Sotāpanna*. *Ariya sammāsamādhi* would then simply be *sammāsamādhi* attained by the *ariyas*. This fits well with the fact that *ariyas* are said to be endowed with the Noble Eightfold Path (S.V.348,3-4), i.e. *ariya sammāsamādhi* together with its seven requisites.□

There is still another way of looking at the passage from M117. According to the Commentary the second type of right view, the view that is supramundane, does in fact not refer to the right view of the *Sotāpanna* but to the right view at the moment of the four paths, i.e. the moment when each of the four stages of Enlightenment is attained. Thus it is identical with *lokuttarajjhāna*. This interpretation is probably the result of the peculiar vocabulary used to qualify *sammāditthi* in the present Sutta, in particular *magganga* and *anāsava* (but also the string *paññā*, *paññindriya*, *paññābala* and *dhammavicayasambojjhanga*), which is reminiscent of Abhidhamma usage. These terms are never used to qualify *sammāditthi* anywhere else in the Suttas, and several of the terms used, such as *magganga*, *anāsavacitta* and *ariyacitta*, are never found at all in the Suttas. It thus seems probable that these words are a late addition, a conclusion reinforced by the fact that the *Āgama* version of this Sutta (i.e. the Chinese equivalent) does not include this vocabulary.

- (15) The fourth occurrence is found at (D.II.216,31 - 217,4) and the fifth at (A.III.25-27).□

- (16) (A.III.27,13) -

"... *paccavekkhanānimittam suggahitam hoti sumanasikatam sūpadhāritam suppatividdham paññāya*".

The *paccavekkhanānimittam* does not occur anywhere else in the Suttas and one has to look to the Vibhanga of the Abhidhamma to find a definition. At (Vibh. 334,1-8) one finds the following: "*Tattha katamā sammāsamādhi? ... Tamhā tamhā samādhimhā vutthitassa paccavekkhanānānam paccavekkhanānimittam.*" - "Therein what is the five-factored right *samādhi*? ... The reviewing knowledge, the reviewing sign of one who has come out of this or that *samādhi* (is the five-factored right *samādhi*)."

If one is to follow the Vibhanga here, then "this or that *samādhi*" would seem to refer to the *samādhis* just mentioned in the Sutta prior to the mentioning of the *paccavekkhanānimittam*, i.e. the four *jhānas*. Thus the *paccavekkhanānimittam* would be based on one or more of the four *jhānas*.

The same conclusion is arrived at when one takes account of the "gradual" nature of the Suttas (cf. A.III.184,17). This means that the standard way of exposition of Dhamma, explicitly recommended by the Buddha and a pattern which is easily recognizable in Sutta after Sutta, is one of natural progression. It is therefore to be expected that the *paccavekkhanānimittam* is a stage on the path which comes after the *jhānas* and which is based on the *jhānas*.□

- (17) (AA.III.232,11-12) -

"*Ariyassa ti vikkhambhanavasena pahinehi kilesehi ārakā thitassa*".

"(Of) noble (means): (of) one standing far from the defilements which have been abandoned due to suppression".

"Abandoning due to suppression", "*vikkhambhanavasena pahinehi*", is a Commentarial reference to suppression due to *jhāna*. Thus it appears that the term '*ariya*' here is related to (ordinary) *jhāna* and not to the stages of Enlightenment.

It might be objected that this passage is about the 'development', 'bhāvanā', of *ariya sammāsamādhi* (i.e. "*ariyassa bhikkhave pañcangikassa sammāsamādhissa bhāvanam desissāmi ...*"; A.III.25,1-2) and not about *ariya sammāsamādhi* itself. However, in the Suttas the development of a particular quality is usually explained in terms of the quality itself. For example, the development (*bhāvanā*) of *satipatthāna* is explained using the standard *satipatthāna* formula (S.V.182,23 - 183,4); the same holds for the *iddhipādas* (S.V.276,15-19), the *sammāppadhānas* (S.V.244,21 - 245,13), and indeed for the *jhānas* themselves (S.V.308,2-11). Thus it seems safe to conclude that the "development of *ariya sammāsamādhi*" is identical with *ariya sammāsamādhi* itself.□

- (18) This still does not answer the question of why the name "*ariyo sammāsamādhi*" is used. I would suggest that because this *samādhi* is defined as the eighth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, supported by the other seven factors, one is in effect developing the entire Noble Eightfold Path when developing this *samādhi*. It would therefore seem that the qualifier "*ariya*" is taken directly from the name of the Noble (*ariya*) Eightfold Path.□
- (19) I argued above that the Sutta terminology for the experiences of Enlightenment never refers to *samādhi* and *jhāna*. However, since the Abhidhamma's *lokuttarajjhāna* is not directly equivalent to this Sutta terminology, it is still necessary to investigate whether it might relate to *jhāna* or *samādhi*.□
- (20) The Commentaries use various terminology, such as *maggasamādhi* and *phalasangamādhi*, which is equivalent to *lokuttarajjhāna*.□
- (21) (M.II.22-29)□
- (22) See (M.II.27,31 - 28,2) & (M.II.28,20-23) respectively.□
- (23) (MA.III.270,14) -

"Pathamajjhānan ti anāgāmīphale pathamajjhānam."

"The first *jhāna* means: the first *jhāna* with reference to the fruit of *anāgāmī*."

(MA.III.270,22-24) -

"Etth'ete ti arahattaphale bhummam dutiyajjhānikam arahattaphalam hi pāpunitvā, kusalasankappā aparisesā nirujjhanti."

"Here these ('here' refers back to the second *jhāna* in the Sutta text; 'these' refers to the wholesome intentions) means: with reference to the fruit of *Arahatta*, having attained the stage of *Arahatta* relating to the second *jhāna*, wholesome intentions cease without remainder."□
- (24) (D.III.126-7) -

"Sabbākāra-sampannam sabbākāra-paripūram anūnam anadhikam svākkhātam kevala-paripūram brahmacariyam suppakāsitam".

Because of the use of 'well-expounded' (*svākkhātam*) and 'well-proclaimed' (*suppakāsitam*) to qualify *brahmacariya*. I understand *brahmacariya* here to be practically equivalent to *dhamma*.□
- (25) Moreover, the use of '*jhāna*' does not appear to add anything that would be lost if the passage simply spoke of the attainments of *Anāgāmī* and *Arahant* respectively.□
- (26) Of course, a single Sutta may not be fully self-explanatory. But all the Suttas taken together should give one a comprehensive and complete understanding of the Dhamma.□
- (27) "*Vivicca akusalehi dhammehi*"; e.g. (D.I.73,23-24).□
- (28) The standard description of the second *jhāna* says: "*avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhijāṃ pītisukham*", "without *vitakka* without *vicāra* with rapture and happiness born of *samādhi*"; e.g. (D.I.74,15).□
- (29) One might think that the expression "ceased without remainder", "*aparisesā nirujjhanti*", is more likely to be

connected with the stages of Enlightenment where defilements are completely uprooted than with *jhāna* where the defilements are only temporarily suppressed. However, in the Suttas this term is also used with reference to the *jhānas* (e.g. M.II.263ff).

It might also seem that because this Sutta ends with a description of the *Arahant*, the previous stages are likely to concern stages of Enlightenment. But it is common in the Suttas to describe the attainment of *Arahantship* directly after the attainment of the *jhānas*, for instance in the gradual training (e.g. D2).□

- (30) (A.III.422,25 - 423,18), the title is taken from the summary (the *uddāna*) at the end of the chapter (*vagga*).□

- (31) (AA.III.410,21) -

"*Samādhin ti maggasamādhi c'eva phalasangādhin ca*".

Maggasamādhi and *phalasangādhin* are Commentarial names for the *lokuttarajjhāna* happening at the path moment (*maggā*) and fruition (*phala*) respectively.□

- (32) It could perhaps be argued that *sammāsamādhi* here refers to the *lokuttarajjhāna* of the first three stages of Enlightenment but not to the fourth. But this would be an additional complication which would lead one even further away from the most straightforward meaning of the passage.□

- (33) "The abandoning of the fetters" is the path (*maggā*) consciousness relating to the attainment of *Arahantship*. *Sammāsamādhi* is here defined in the Commentary in such a way that it appears to include the fruition (*phala*) consciousness relating to *Arahantship*. The fruition consciousness comes *after* the path consciousness.□

- (34) (A.III.423,2 - 423,7) -

"*Cittassa nimittam aganhanto sammāditthim paripūressatī ti n'etam thānam vijjati. Sammāditthim aparipūretvā sammāsamādhim paripūressatī ti n'etam thānam vijjati. Sammāsamādhim aparipūretvā samyojanāni pajahissatī ti n'etam thānam vijjati. Samyojanāni appahāya nibbānam sacchikarissatī ti n'etam thānam vijjati.*"□

- (35) See for example the *Sāmaññaphala* Sutta (D2). The Commentary does not explain the *jhāna* of the gradual training as *lokuttarajjhāna* (but it also does not exclude it), see (DA.I.217,14-18).□

- (36) (M.I.434,25-31 + 435,26-436,17) -

"*Yo Ānanda maggo yā patipadā pañcannam orambhāgiyānam samyojanānam pahānāya tam maggam tam patipadam anāgama pañc'orambhāgiyāni samyojanāni nassati vā dakkhīti vā pajahissati vā ti n'etam thānam vijjati. Seyyathā pi Ānanda mahato rukkhassa tithato sāravato tacam acchetvā pheggum acchetvā sārachedo bhavissatī ti n'etam thānam vijjati ...*

Katamo c'Ānanda maggo katamā patipadā pañcannam orambhāgiyānam samyojanānam pahānāya: Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu ... pathamam jhānam upasampajja viharati ... dutiyam jhānam ... tatiyam jhānam ... catuttham jhānam ..."□

- (37) In fact it would seem impossible that the *jhānas* of M64 refer to *lokuttarajjhāna*. In this Sutta the *jhānas* themselves are viewed as *dukkha*, *anicca*, and *anattā* for the purpose of going beyond them and attaining at least to *Anāgāmī*. This could therefore not refer to *lokuttarajjhāna* because that attainment is nothing but *Nibbāna* itself and consequently cannot be considered as *dukkha*.□

- (38) With the possible exception of *animittasamādhi*, see note 9 above. It is difficult, however, to draw any authoritative conclusions on the precise nature of *animittasamādhi* based on the Suttas alone. In the Suttas, it remains a marginal form of *samādhi* compared to the *jhānas* (see note 1 above) and as such its relevance is limited. Other types of *samādhi* that may or may not relate directly to the stages of Enlightenment, such as *suññatasamādhi*, *appanīhitasamādhi*, and even *aññāphalasangādhin* (A.IV.428), are even more marginal. In any case, if the present discussion is limited to the *jhānas* (and thus *sammāsamādhi*) the situation is quite clear cut.□

- (39) This may seem more radical than it really is. As do most Buddhist monks, I agree that it is important to respect the Commentaries and all post-*Nikāya* Pali works. After all, these works are the opinions of (presumably) highly respected Buddhist monks. One is obliged to be extremely careful not to overestimate one's own understanding above that of a strong and respected tradition. If there is any doubt, and one does not have direct experience of the Dhamma oneself, one should always defer to the tradition.

Having said this, however, one has to keep in mind what the Buddha stated in the Four Great Standards of the *Mahāparinibbāna* Sutta (D.II.13,30 - 126,5): that the word of any authority, other than that of the Buddha, which claims to speak the Dhamma should always be checked against what is known with adequate certainty to be the Buddha's own statements (i.e. the four main *Nikāyas*). What I have tried to do in this paper is simply to subject one specific Commentarial interpretation to this test.□

- (40) (S.II.224,14-21 + 224,25-225,4) -

"Seyyathāpi Kassapa na tāva jātarūpassa antaradhānam hoti yāva na jātarūpapatirūpakam loke uppajjati. Yato ca kho Kassapa jātarūpapatirūpakam loke uppajjati atha jātarūpassa antaradhānam hoti. Evam eva kho Kassapa na tāva saddhammassa antaradhānam hoti yāva na saddhammapatirūpakam loke uppajjati. Yato ca kho Kassapa saddhammapatirūpakam loke uppajjati atha saddhammam antaradhānam hoti. ...

Atha kho idheva te uppajjanti moghāpurisā ye imam saddhammam antaradhāpentī.

Seyyathāpi Kassapa nāvā ādikeneva opilavati na kho Kassapa evam saddhammassa antaradhānam hoti. Pañca kho me Kassapa okkamaniyā dhammā saddhammassa sammosāya antaradhānāya samvattanti. Katame pañca? Idha Kassapa bhikkhū bhikkhuniyo upāsakā upāsikāyo satthari agāravā viharanti appatissā, dhamme agāravā viharanti appatissā, sanghe agāravā viharanti appatissā, sikkhāya agāravā viharanti appatissā, samādhismim agāravā viharanti appatissā. Ime kho Kassapa pañca okkamaniyā dhammā saddhammassa sammosāya antaradhānāya samvattanti."□

- (41) All this seems to be a natural process. I think it highly unlikely that members of the Sangha would intentionally distort the Dhamma.□
- (42) A similar passage is found at (A.IV.84,9-19). There are also a number of passages that mention the same list of five things as being respected by various persons. For example at (A.IV.27,21 - 31,10) there are four Suttas mentioning seven qualities that lead to non-decline, the five factors common to all these Suttas being the Triple Gem, the training, and *samādhi*. Another such set of seven occurs at (A.IV.120,4 - 125,9). Finally, at (S.V.234,26-31) an *Arahant* is said to conduct himself with supreme honour towards the *Tathāgata* and the Dhamma by being reverential and deferential to the same basic set of five.□
- (43) Note the correspondence here between the Buddha warning that it is "senseless people" in the Sangha itself that cause the Dhamma to disappear and the fact that the Commentaries (written by the Sangha) seem to be distorting the Dhamma. (Again, this distortion seems to be natural and unavoidable. If it had not been for the Sangha's efforts in preserving the Dhamma, it would almost certainly have disappeared long ago.)□
- (44) It is the second book of the Abhidhamma, the Vibhanga, which is of interest here.□
- (45) This division is one of the main organising principles of the Vibhanga. However, it should be noted that many scholars consider the Vibhanga to be the earliest part of the Abhidhamma. It thus seems likely that in the rest of the Abhidhamma this division is implied, even if rarely explicitly stated.□
- (46) I.e. the *indriyas*, the *satipatthānas*, the *bojjhangas*, etc.□
- (47) These sets are collectively known as the *Bodhipakkīyadhammas* and they are very prominent in the Suttas, see in particular volume V of the Samyutta *Nikāya*. (It should be noted that the Vibhanga includes other sets as well - i.e. apart

from the *Bodhipakkhiyadhammas* - but these sets are generally not concerned with *lokuttarajjhāna* and are therefore not relevant to this study.) It is significant that when these sets are spoken of in the Suttas they are always spoken of in terms of "development" or "cultivation", i.e. "*bhāvanā*". This seems to be a clear indication that they form part of the *path* of practice and not the *result* of practicing the path. This is in sharp contrast to the Sutta terminology used to describe the attainments of the stages of Enlightenment (i.e. the *results* of practice), terminology such as: "realization" (*śacchikiriyā*); "attainment" (*anuppatta*); "liberation" (*vimutta*); etc. This distinction seems to be very consistent in the Suttas, the former being the path, the latter the results.□

- (48) This is so for all the sets that make up the *Bodhipakkhiyadhammas* apart from the 5 *indriyas*; for the *indriyas* only an Abhidhamma exposition is given.□

- (49) This is not surprising because one of the main purposes of the Abhidhamma is precisely to analyze existence into its component parts.□

- (50) This does not mean that the Abhidhamma analysis necessarily is wrong, rather that it is not directly comparable to the Sutta usage. It could be argued that the Abhidhamma-exposition describes the culmination of the path as described by the Sutta-exposition (see "The Buddhist Path to Awakening" by Rupert Gettin). Although the two expositions may thus be compatible, they are still concerned with two very different aspects of Buddhist practice, i.e. *the result of practicing the path* and *the path itself* respectively.□

- (51) Rewritten, that is, for those who rely exclusively on the Commentaries to explain the Suttas.□
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